

FACT SHEET for SUPPORTED EDUCATION

What it is: Supported education is providing services to people who have a mental illness so they can have access to and utilize resources that will help them succeed in a college, university or technical training program.

What it does: College personnel provide, in addition to academic counseling, accommodations to address problems in functioning students may have as a result of their psychiatric disabilities. Mental health staffs provide information about education services, advocacy, support and case management services.

Who returns to school? The average supported education student who returns to school is about 34 years of age and has a diagnosis of schizophrenia, major depression or bi-polar disorder. The average age of onset of the psychiatric illness is 20 years of age. The average student has been hospitalized seven times and has spent 11 months in the hospital.

What accommodations are necessary? The most common accommodations needed by people with mental illness are extended time for exams, changes in format or time frames for exams or assignments, tutoring, note taking assistance or tape recorders. The most common services needed are assistance with registration and financial aid. Research has shown that students with psychiatric disabilities do not need more accommodations than students with other disabilities.

What are common problems? Stigma is the largest issue students face. Most people still believe that mental illness is a debilitating life-long disease and that people with a mental illness are dangerous. Research has shown that with treatment and medication, most people with mental illness do recover and can return to school or work. Research has also shown that people with mental illness do not commit more crimes than others. They are, however, often the victims of crime.

Do people with a mental illness disrupt the learning environment? Students with a mental illness may be disruptive, but no more so than other students. However, the law is clear that people with a mental illness may be held accountable for their actions even though the actions may be the result of the illness. A student code of conduct is the most important tool in maintaining appropriate standards of behavior for all students.

Can people with a mental illness learn and master new skills? According to a recent study, students complete 90 percent of the courses for which they enroll with a grade point average is 3.14. Furthermore, a diagnosis of a mental illness does not significantly affect completion rates, credits completed or grades.

What are the positive benefits of supported education? People who are enrolled in a supported education program have decreased incidences of hospitalization. Forty-two percent of those who are or were enrolled in supported education programs are working an average of 20 hours per week. Supported education is significantly and positively related to successful employment and is the single best indicator for successful employment outcomes.

©Karen V. Unger, MSW, Ed.D. Rehabilitation Through Education, P.O. Box 82176, Portland, OR 97282-0176 (503) 232 7085 phone, e-mail kvunger@easystreet.com